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TO RUEHC/SECSTATE WASHDC PRIORITY 3866  
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RUEHLM/AMEMBASSY COLOMBO 7882  
RUEHNE/AMEMBASSY NEW DELHI 9836  
RUEHKT/AMEMBASSY KATHMANDU 9043  
RUEHLO/AMEMBASSY LONDON 1680  
RUEHBY/AMEMBASSY CANBERRA 0316  
RUEHOT/AMEMBASSY OTTAWA 0683  
RUEHCI/AMCONSUL CALCUTTA  
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S E C R E T SECTION 01 OF 02 DHAKA 000655

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E.O. 12958: DECL: 04/19/2017

TAGS: PHUM PREL PGOV BG

SUBJECT: SHAMSHER CHOWDHURY OFF-MESSAGE: MFA CORRECTS  
INTENTION ON SHEIKH HASINA

REF: SECSTATE 51876

Classified By: Deputy Chief of Mission Geeta Pasi; Reason 1.4(d)

¶11. (S) Summary: MFA Director General Islam confirmed that the MFA directed Ambassador Chowdhury to personally ask the airlines not to permit Hasina to board any aircraft but only to inform the U.S. of his actions, admitting he exceeded his instructions in requesting USG assistance. Separately, Acting Foreign Secretary Touhid Hossain confirmed to the Ambassador that Sheikh Hasina's passport has been revoked. End Summary.

¶12. (S) On April 19, the Deputy Chief of Mission called on Ministry of Foreign Affairs America and Pacific Wing Director General Shahidul Islam. Poloff (notetaker), and MFA officers Abida Islam and Khastigher Rahman were also present.

DCM MAKES DEMARCHE; MFA CORRECTS MESSAGE

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¶13. (S) The DCM made the points in reftel, namely that Bangladesh Ambassador to the U.S. Shamsher Chowdhury asked that the U.S. confiscate Sheikh Hasina's passport and advise the airlines not to board her as she presented a threat to security. The DCM said that the U.S. would do neither. She underscored that the USG is aware of no reason to declare Sheikh Hasina a security threat. She said that the USG has no plans to confiscate the passport of Sheikh Hasina or to inform law enforcement or airline officials that Sheikh Hasina presents a threat to security of any kind or in any way prevent her departure from the United States.

¶14. (S) The DCM shared a copy of the aide-memoire passed to Department later the same day on April 17 by the Bangladesh Embassy which said "the presence of Sheikh Hasina, President of the Bangladesh Awami League, who is currently visiting the United States of America, is not desired in Bangladesh at this time for security reasons. Accordingly, the Embassy would like to request the esteemed Department to make it known to the relevant authorities so that Sheikh Hasina is not allowed to board an aircraft for her return to Bangladesh at this time." The DCM noted that this request came as a surprise to us and Washington. Had there been a prior discussion with the U.S. Mission in Dhaka, we would have informed the MFA that this request would be impossible for the U.S. to comply with.

¶15. (S) Mr. Islam excused himself to consult with the Foreign

Secretary and returned shortly thereafter to confirm what the

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Ambassador learned earlier. On the margins of another event on April 19, the Ambassador spoke with Acting Foreign Secretary Touhid Hossain. The Ambassador stated that the USG

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cannot comply with the request made by Bangladesh Ambassador Shamsher Chowdhury to prevent Hasina from traveling. Touhid replied that Ambassador Chowdhury's instructions were to talk to the airlines to not allow Hasina to travel and to describe the situation to Under Secretary Burns. Touhid expressly said that the written request for USG action exceeded Ambassador Chowdhury's authority. Touhid added that the Bangladesh government revoked Hasina's passport.

¶16. (S) The DCM touched on the Comprehensive Message Framework and drawing on points in reftel she stressed the urgent need to lift the ban on political parties, ensure full transparency in election reform, provide for full participation by political parties, and to respect due process and international standards of human rights.

CORRECTING ANOTHER MISPERCEPTION

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¶17. (S) The Ambassador told Touhid about Ambassador Chowdhury's claim that she had publicly called for his replacement. She advised that her only message has been that the position of Ambassador to Washington is too important to be left vacant during this critical period. Touhid said that he understood this message and agreed that Bangladesh would seek quickly to fill the Bangladesh Ambassador position. Touhid frankly looked embarrassed.

¶18. (S) Mr. Islam called the DCM after their meeting to ask

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that we not share this incident with the press.  
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